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SALVADORAN MAN PLEADS GUILTY FOR HIS ROLE IN CONSPIRACY TO SMUGGLE SCORES OF MIGRANTS INTO THE UNITED STATES

WASHINGTON – A Salvadoran national has pleaded guilty to engaging in a conspiracy to smuggle or attempt to smuggle scores of Central American migrants into the United States for the purpose of private financial gain, and to causing the death of at least one person during the journey, Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney R. Alexander Acosta of the Southern District of Florida announced today.

Jose Sixto Ramirez entered the plea today before Judge William P. Dimitrouleas of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida. Sixto Ramirez admitted that his travel agency in San Miguel, El Salvador accepted payment from scores of migrants wishing to enter the United States illegally. Sixto Ramirez further admitted that in March 2000, he addressed the group of between 80 and 100 migrants about their journey to the United States which would occur on foot, by truck and by train, and then turned the group over to two guides—Marvin Arnoldo Ramirez-Chavez and Rene Aguilar Carballo. Chavez and Aguilar, in turn, transported the migrants through Guatemala and into Southern Mexico where they eventually boarded a train. While on the train, many migrants succumbed to the heat and the lack of ventilation in the closed boxcars and were rendered unconscious or died. Sixto Ramirez admitted that his role in the conspiracy contributed to the death of at least one migrant, Jose Antonio Flores-Bonilla, who suffocated in the boxcar.

“The defendant in this case admits that he sent dozens of people on the path to an illegal and ultimately deadly journey to the United States,” said Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division. “We will continue to aggressively pursue these types of alien smuggling cases, in which lives are jeopardized for personal profit.”

“This case tragically demonstrates the smugglers’ callous disregard for the value of human life,” said U.S. Attorney R. Alexander Acosta of the Southern District of Florida. “Their victims, seeking a better life, instead paid for their dreams with their very lives.”

“This is another tragic reminder of the callousness displayed by human smugglers whose only regard is to profit at the expense of others,” said Julie L. Myers, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement. “We are pleased with today’s guilty plea and remain committed to working with our law enforcement partners to prosecute these egregious cases, demonstrating to other would-be smugglers the high cost of such criminal acts.”

Sixto Ramirez, Chavez and Aguilar were indicted on Jan. 11, 2005 on 19 counts of conspiracy to commit alien smuggling, encouraging or inducing aliens to come to, enter and reside in the United States, and attempted bringing of unauthorized aliens for financial gain.

Charges against Aguilar were subsequently dismissed without prejudice. Chavez has not yet been apprehended and remains at large.

Sixto Ramirez faces a maximum sentence of life in prison, and a fine of up to \$250,000. Sentencing has been scheduled for Nov. 19, 2007.

The case is being prosecuted by Trial Attorney Samuel Marsh of the Domestic Security Section of the Criminal Division and Assistant U.S. Attorney Patricia Diaz of the Southern District of Florida, Ft. Lauderdale Office. The investigation in this case was led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement at the Department of Homeland Security, with the assistance of authorities in El Salvador and Mexico.

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